

Habakkuk: “Hope-Giving Love” // *The Minor Prophets 4*

Welcome SC, at all 11, now, of our campus locations in the Triangle. Special greeting to our brothers and sisters in the prison...

Open your Bibles to the book of Habakkuk... The 4th in our series of 5 minor prophets.

Habakkuk has a strange name—one I’m honestly not sure how to pronounce. Habakkuk, Hebbakuck, Habbakook, Chewbacca...

His name may sound strange, but **his book considers** a number of questions that we commonly ask:

Like: **How am I going to make it through this season?** You go through some season in your life when things seem to be falling apart all around you, and things on the horizon don’t look any better?

- **That’s how it was for Habakkuk.** He lived and prophesied around **600 B.C.**, at a time when things were unraveling fast in the Southern Kingdom of Israel, Judah. (MAP)
 - The **Northern Kingdom, called “Israel,”** had already been carried away into exile, and **Judah** had endured a series of bad kings.
 - **Drought had devastated the land** to the point that their fields produced little to no fruit, and **their cattle had** all either starved to death or been stolen.
 - Habakkuk describes the situation himself, **3:17** “...the fig tree does not blossom, there is fruit on the vines, the produce of

Works Consulted:

“Rejoicing in Tribulation,” Tim Keller

“Generosity in Scarcity,” Tim Keller

“Will I Get Through This?” James MacDonald

“Even if Not,” Tim Lucas

Habakkuk, Paul House

the olive fails and the fields yield no food, the flock is cut off from the fold and there is no herd in the stalls...”

- Basically: that reads like a Hebrew country song: My wife left me, I lost my job, my truck broke down and my dog died.
- **But, the point was:** The region of Judah was undergoing a starvation-level social collapse—think Europe after WW2.
- In addition to that, the Babylonians presented a looming threat, and **God had told Habakkuk and other prophets that Babylon** would soon invade the southern Kingdom, destroy it, and carry the survivors away captive.
- And Habakkuk says, **“God, how are we going to make it?”**
- Maybe you are **facing a bad medical diagnosis**, or a crumbling marriage, or financial difficulty. Or a boyfriend of many years and you just broke up and you have no prospects for the future.
- Habakkuk was written for you.

Which leads to the second question: **“God, where are you? I thought you loved us?”** Listen to Habakkuk’s opening statement: “O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and you will not hear? Or cry to you “Violence!” and you will not save? 3 Why... do you idly look at wrong? (1:2–3)

- **Idly.** Do you ever dare admit you feel like that? Like God seems to sit idly by while you suffer. You say, “God, are you even there?”
 - Sometimes life feels like you’re in the middle of a **really depressing TV series**. You ever get into one of these shows where everything is going wrong and you start to wonder how in the world the storyline can possibly end well? But you think, “Suerly the writers will come up with some way to **pull it back** around at the end, and it will **all make sense...**”

- **But what if they don't?**
- I think the show **LOST** permanently scarred me from confidence in good endings. I kept thinking—*one day they're going to pull all this together and it's all going to make sense...* And I **watched, and watched—faithfully, for like 6 years...** and when the last episode ended, I was like, “What? I feel **more lost** than ever now... Is that what the **writer's intended**? Maybe “lost” is how I was supposed to feel after I watched it? I **hate** this show.” And, **how can polar bears survive** on tropical islands? I should have known something was off then.
- **But sometimes you wonder**, “*Is life going to turn like that?*” As Shakespeare said, *A tale told by an idiot, sound and fury signifying nothing*. No **happy ending**, no **redeeming purpose** in all that has happened.

Which leads to the **3rd question**: “**God, how is this fair?**” Babylon, who was causing Israel all these problems, was a much more wicked and godless nation than Israel. **So, Habakkuk asks**, “*God, how is it fair that we go through this, while Babylon gets off scot-free?*” Everythin they touch works out for them, while we are terrorized! How is this fair? I thought you were a just God!

- **1:13** “You who are of purer eyes than to see evil and cannot look at wrong, so why do you look idly at traitors and remain silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he?”
- Do you ever feel like that?

3 questions all of us, I would say, ask...

The book of Habakkuk is unusual in that it is not a sermon written to the nation, like most of the other prophets wrote. Instead, it is a conversation between Habakkuk and God that Habakkuk later wrote down.

In the book, Habakkuk presents a series of complaints, then he says: **2:1** *Now I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on

the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.

Then God answers him and Habakkuk argues back again and God answers him again and flexes his muscles a little and Habakkuk shuts up, but as he does so he offers one of the greatest statements of faith ever recorded in the Bible.

The shape of Habakkuk's book is supposed to teach us something. It shows us what the internal growth of faith in our hearts looks like.

Several portions of the Old Testament are like this. Rather than simply telling us what God says, the writer opens up his heart and lets us learn from their faith struggle.

- Several of the Psalms are like this...
- The book of **Job** is that way;
- **One of the other MP's** is this way too: The book of **Jonah** is a story about one of the prophets struggling to love like God loves.

Habakkuk's book is, at times, uncomfortably candid. He'll say things and you'll say, “Can you say that to God?” And you can learn a lesson from that right off: God is ok with your struggles, and he's ok with your questions.

- When **Habakkuk questioned God**, God didn't snap back with, “How dare thou talkest to me that way, thou worm, Habakkuk?” No, he seems to welcome Habakkuk's questions. Think about it, God even saw fit to put this book in the Bible so that we could learn from it.
- **Doubt is one of God's most common tools to drive you deeper into faith.**
 - **Doubt is like a foot poised...**
 - Faith that hasn't been tested with doubt is shallow, and fragile. God wants to grow it and strengthen it.
- And **that's what you'll see happen with Habakkuk.**

Years ago, I read the story of ALAN GARDNER... an English missionary who was **shipwrecked on a remote island off** the coast of South America in route to start a new mission on that continent. They tried to stick it out and wait for somebody to come and rescue them, **but no one came, and finally, they died of starvation**. Several months later, **when the 'rescuers' finally found them**, they discovered the body of Gardner with his personal journal underneath.

The **last thing inscribed in it was Psalm 34:10**, "Those that seek the Lord lack no good thing." Underneath that verse was this final phrase, "*I am overwhelmed with a sense of the goodness of God.*"

- Most of us read that and think, "**Goodness?**" How could he talk about the goodness of God at a time like that? Is that what you would have been thinking about? Wouldn't you rather have been scared? Or angry? "God, why have you forsaken me?"
- **He knew the secret that Habakkuk knew...** and I want to share it with you.

It is a power that will **not only give you strength** in those kinds of tragic moments, but will **literally infuse your life with a supernatural strength** in every moment:

- **It is called the power of hope**, and it is the most powerful force on the planet:
- **Illus.** There is a legendary experiment conducted at Johns Hopkins university in which a researcher was trying to determine how long a rat could swim. If you just threw the rats in the water, they could only last **10 minutes before...** But if he took them out **2–3 times during those first 10 minutes** and put them back in, the rats could swim for more than **60 hours**. Changing no factor except the introduction of hope gave the rats the ability to swim more than 100x longer than without it!¹
- My purpose is to give God's **Summit Church rats** hope this weekend, so that you can keep swimming.

- For those of you **who feel like God is nowhere to be found**. For those of you who feel like your **situation is hopeless**. For those who are **angry or, even worse, numb**, I want you to **find hope**—not a pep talk, but real hope.

Let's start with...

I. Habakkuk's Complaint (Habakkuk 1:2–4; 12–17)*

Habakkuk's question is really an age-old problem: The world often doesn't seem like it's being ruled by a good, all-wise, all-powerful God.

Philosophers call this "problem of evil," and they trace this question all the way back to a 5th century B.C. Greek philosopher named Epicurus, who basically said: ***If God really is all powerful, he could stop all the evil. And if he was really loving, he would want to stop it all. So, the fact that pain, suffering and injustice ran rampant on the earth means, then, that either God is not all powerful or good.***

(My shortened version of that: *If he's good, he would. If he could, he should. Since he doesn't, that means he isn't.*)

This is **an age-old problem**, and we see here that Habakkuk framed it long before Epicurus did (***which always brings me comfort...*** *We're not asking new questions. People of faith from the beginning have struggled with this...)*

II. God's Answer (Habakkuk 1:5–11; 2:2–20)*

God's answer has basically 4 components:

¹ <http://www.psychosomaticmedicine.org/content/19/3/191.full.pdf>

The first, God says, **1:5**, “Look among the nations, and see; wonder and be astounded. For I am doing a work in your days that you would not believe if told.

- I’m doing **something absolutely amazing** through these things—I’ve got a **bigger plan** than you can realize.
 - In the invasion of the Babylonians I am setting up a situation that will more clearly display the rescuing work of my Son.
- It is **beyond anything you could understand** at this moment, to the point you wouldn’t believe it even if I told you, but it will lead to my glory and your ultimate salvation.

And that’s the **second** thing: **2:14**, For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

- The bigger thing that I am doing is covering the earth with the knowledge of my glory, which means **this turn of events is going to lead** to a lot more people coming to salvation.

Third part of his answer: **2:4**, “...the righteous shall live by his faith.”

- **If you are going to walk with me in the world, it will have to be by faith**, which means you must acknowledge that there’s a number of things you won’t be able fully to see.

Fourth: **2:20**, “The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him...”

The last thing he does is **give Habakkuk a vision of himself** sitting high on a throne above it all, and says, “If I am still on my throne, you can trust me with unanswered questions.”

Let me go philosophical for a minute. *Is it possible for a good God to allow something painful when he could stop it?* A little philosophy book I’m reading presents this scenario:²

- **Imagine a commando in WW2** who is dropped behind enemy lines, posing as a German officer so he can get into a concentration camp and destroy the gas chambers. Now imagine that as he mingles with other officers he sees a soldier preparing to execute a prisoner. **This is an evil he could stop by simply shooting the soldier, but at what cost?** He might save one person, but his mission is to save many. More lives would be lost in the long run if he prevents an individual death, but does not stop the gas chambers from destroying thousands.

So, is it possible for a good person to allow something evil, even though he can stop it? Yes. He might allow a lesser evil to prevent an even greater one.

- Or how about this one: **When my third daughter, Ryah, turned 1, we took her in for a round of shots.** (*You know, they should require some kind of parent-debriefing before one experiences child immunizations because as hard it was for her, I was totally unprepared.*) The doctor asked me to hold my little girl on my lap as she stuck the needle in her arm four different times. Each time, my daughter let out a scream that could have woken the dead. What was worse, though, was **how frantically she looked around the room searching for help. When her eyes found mine, it was clear she expected me to do something** to stop this cruel doctor. But there I sat—not only not stopping the doctor—but helping her! I know **she couldn’t understand why** the one whom she thought loved her was not helping her. She couldn’t perceive that I was doing what I was doing *because* I loved her, not *in spite of* the fact that I did. She only felt abandoned and betrayed.

But **my point is simply this:** *It is possible for a good person to allow something painful to happen if they know something better will come out of it.*

² Gregory Koukl, *The Story of Reality*

- Is it not possible that a lot of the pain that God allows us to go through on earth might be like that, too?
- **Just as those painful shots produced a healthier life** for my daughter, might it be that our pain in life will yield a greater and happier eternity?

You say, “But I can’t see any good coming out of this!”

- Well, just because you can’t see it doesn’t mean it isn’t happening.
- **If I ask you, ‘Is there an elephant in the auditorium in which you are sitting?’** You can answer that with a reasonable amount of confidence. *If you can’t see one, it’s reasonable to conclude it is not there.*
- **But if I say, “Are there any lice in the building you are sitting in?”** If you take a quick look around and say ‘no,’ just because you can’t see one, that confidence could be unwarranted. The person right in front of you could have a head full of them. (BTW, the next person to itch their head is really going to look really suspicious)

The point is, understanding all the purposes of an all-wise God might be more like locating fleas than spotting elephants. And faith trusts God with that.

Is God on his throne? That’s the fundamental question we have to answer.

Which leads us now to Habakkuk’s great statement of faith, which is, as I said, one of the greatest in all the Bible...

III. Life-Giving Hope (Habakkuk 3)*

He starts in vs 1: **3:1, 2 O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear.***

In the next 15 verses, he is going to recount the Exodus in poetic language, which was the **Old Testament’s ultimate picture of salvation.**

- **“His brightness was like the light, rays flashed from his hand...” 3:4** (a reference to God’s appearance at Mt. Sinai)
- **“Before him went pestilence, and plagues followed at his heel...” 3:5** (the plagues)
- **“The mountains saw you and writhed, the raging waters swept on, the deep gave forth its voice and lifted its hands on high...” 3:10** (the splitting of the Red Sea)
- **“The sun and moon stood still in their place at the flash of your glittering spear...” 3:11** (reference to how the sun stood still with Joshua)
- **“You went out for the salvation of your people, for the salvation of your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked, laying him bare from thigh to neck. Selah.” 3:13** (the Exodus and how God brought the nation of Egypt to its knees)

That meditation is **going to remind him of several things:**

- **First, in reality,** (and this is really important and hard to grasp) **we are not innocent people suffering.**
 - In the Exodus, God was delivering his people from slavery, and their captivity in Egypt was a picture of the self-imposed slavery of sin.
 - God didn’t create us to suffer, we as a race put that on ourselves by rejecting God, a rebellion **all of us** have participated in.
 - **Now, let me be really clear, here.** I’m not saying that the particular bad things in your life are happening directly because you sinned, as if God is paying you back directly for something you previously did.
 - I am saying that suffering, in general, exists in the world because the human race sinned, a rebellion in which we all have participated in.

- **Which means that none of us can really point our finger at God and say, “I don’t deserve any of this.”** Our sin warranted eternal death, so the fact that we woke up this morning and experienced sunshine on our faces and breath in our lungs is a bestowal of mercy.
 - **Luke 13**, a tower fell on 18 Jews and killed them. The disciples asked Jesus...
 - **R.C. Sproul** was once asked, “Why do bad things happen to good people?” He said, “Well, when I meet a “good people,” I’ll let you know.”
- **Second thing that Habakkuk’s meditation on the Exodus does for him: It reminds him that God is not short on power.**
 - God manipulated the most powerful nations at will! He controlled the sun and the moon and split the oceans.
 - He’s **not limited** by anything.
- **Thirdly, God has not given up on us.** He delivered his people for a purpose, and he’s not going to let that purpose die, ever.

So, after meditating on these things, Habakkuk says: **16** I hear, and my body trembles; my lips quiver at the sound; rottenness enters into my bones; my legs tremble beneath me.

Habakkuk’s *circumstances* hadn’t changed, so he doesn’t *feel* awesome.

- Body trembles (Lit. Hebrew “bowels”)—stomach was upset,
- lips quivered (crying),
- Consumed by grief...

He **dreads** the coming trouble: The invasion. The deprivation. The death.

- (Or, for you: The sickness. The dissolving family. The financial hardship.)

But here is his resolve: ***Yet I will quietly wait for the day of trouble to come upon people who invade us.**

- In Hebrew, “quietly wait” means deep peace and repose. He’s choosing this...

And then he says... **17** Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, **18** yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. **19** God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places. **Leave this up? Highlight things as I go*

This is the faith God had called for in chapter 2, when he said “the righteous will live by faith.” And, **what characterizes it is HOPE:**

Here’s what we learn about life-giving hope from his statement:

- 1. Hope can exist alongside grief (3:16)** **Maybe bring these up one at a time below the text (not adding each time, since there’s not enough room, just one at a time below the text, replacing the previous one)*
 - Like I showed you, his feelings hadn’t changed—he’s still eaten up with grief.
 - You see, there’s a real danger when we talk of these things of implying that faith is some kind of stiff-upper-lipped stoicism, or that being filled with sorrow is a lack of faith.
 - **That’s not what you see in the Bible.**
 - Job 1 says when Job heard about the terrible things that had happened to his business, and then his family, he arose, tore his garments, fell on the ground, and in all these things he “sinned not.”
 - Jesus: We know he was perfect, yet it says he was filled with sorrow and sometimes wept.
 - “Grieve, and not like those who have no hope.”

2. Hope is a choice (vs. 18)

- I will wait patiently (vs. 16); Vs. 18, **"I will rejoice."** That is the language of choice.
- Which is why in the book of Philippians, Paul gives it as a command: *"Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say rejoice!"*
- **Rejoicing is not a description of the feelings you have.** It is a choice to posture your heart to what you know to be true even when you don't feel it.
 - Like I told you a few weeks ago, your feelings don't have brains! You have to tell them how to feel.
 - You cannot command yourself to be happy. But what you can do is explain to yourself why you should be happy.
- **Faith realizes it possesses something in God deeper and better** than anything else life can give, and **something more secure** than anything death can take away.
 - **Luke 10:** The disciples had come back after Jesus had sent them out in ministry and they were excited they had power over demons...
 - **See,** for us preachers, that's a big day. For you stock brokers, a big day is when you sell a stock for 5x ROI. Or, estate agents, when you close on 5 properties in a week. For us preachers, when we cast out a demon, that's our big day.
 - Jesus said, "Don't rejoice that that demons are subject to you... maybe there are days that you won't feel that way (days the church won't grow, the stocks won't come in)..." rejoice in who you are in me and what you have in me, for that never changes.

3. Hope comes from remember and repeating (3:3-15)

- We need to **learn a lesson from what Habakkuk did here** in rehearsing the Exodus.
- **The Bible never tells you anything once.** It repeats it over and over.

- **Ps 103: "Bless the Lord,** oh my soul... and forget not all his benefits! And then he reviews the benefits of his salvation, just like Habakkuk did.
- **Your spiritual health will be directly determined by how often** you review the benefits of your salvation and the God behind it all.
- **Listen, I don't flatter myself that any one sermon** will sustain you for the rest of your life. I used to think that. I'd explain it once and we'd all be set for life. I don't think that anymore.
- This sermon may get you through this week. But you'll need to repeat and review the gospel often.
- **When life saps your strength,** you need to force yourself to remember and repeat, and wrestle with God until he reveals himself and his glory to you, like he did to Habakkuk.
- You need to **stand there with Habakkuk on the watchtower** and say, I am going to stay here until who you are and what you've done become real to me again.
- Some of you **haven't really met with God** in years, which is why your faith sags so much...

Which brings me to...

4. The heights of hope come from the depths of faith (3:19)

- **19 God, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer's; he makes me tread on my high places.**
 - In ancient times, the **SUMMIT was the safest place** to be because you couldn't be attacked and you could see for miles in all directions.
 - **'Feet like the deer's'** means you are sure-footed. Ever seen one of these mountain deer? They are nimble and they can move across things. When I am trying to walk across the same mountain face I'm staggering and slipping...
- **When God becomes your strength, your joy,** that is what you'll be like. You'll have a **joy safely above** what pain or disease or

death or disappointment can destroy, and you **won't stumble**, even in the toughest seasons of life.

NOTICE specifically, that new height of faith comes having God himself as your joy, rather than him giving you things that bring you joy.

- See,
 - **18 yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation.** Not joy from God, but joy in God.
 - **19 God, the Lord, is my strength;** not “he gives me strength,” but “he is my strength.”
 - **This is when you have a faith that dwells in the mountaintops and feet like a deer's.**
- **And here's the thing: This is where God wants to take you**, but the only way it can happen is through trial.
- There are **aspects of God you can only know** when your fields are empty and there's no cattle in your stall... when your marriage is broken or you feel alone.
 - **I think of John 11...** Lazarus. Jesus intentionally waited! Mary comes up, and says, “If you would have been here, my brother wouldn't have died.” And Jesus weeps with Mary. Why? The reason is because when you love someone, you weep with them, even when you know it's temporary (my daughter's shots).
 - And Mary **got that glimpse into Jesus' heart...**
 - He's not only the God who raises the dead, he's the God who weeps when we weep.
 - And she would never have gotten that glimpse had Lazarus not gotten sick and Jesus not delayed in healing him...
 - The greatest thing God can give you is the knowledge of who he is—to see the value of his presence in your life, to feel the constant warmth of his compassion toward you, and it will only come through trial.

- **That knowledge, Peter says**, is more valuable than gold, and better than any earthly answer to prayer, so rejoice, he says, when you go through trials that produce it.

(MUSIC)

- **George Mueller was 19th century pastor who ran an orphanage and was famous for receiving stunning answers to prayer.** More than once he sat the kids down with nothing to eat and prayed and had someone, unknown to him, while he was praying, show up at the door with bread or milk.

In 1890, his **wife contracted rheumatic fever.** He prayed earnestly for her healing, but she died. She was only 57. The last verse he read to her was **Psalm 84:11**, “No good thing will he withhold from those whose walk is blameless.”

And then **at her funeral he preached from Psalm 119:68**, “*Thou art good and doest good.*”

He and his wife had learned that the goodness of God in their life was better than life, and that his goodness went deeper than the pain of life and was more abiding than the pleasures of life.

This is Habakkuk's faith...

One more thing...

5. Hope in the future leads to prayer in the present (3:1–2)

- Let's go back to... **3:1–2** O Lord, I have heard the report of you, and your work, O Lord, do I fear. So look at what he says next! In the midst of the years revive it; in the midst of the years make it known; in wrath remember mercy.
 - “the years” = my years. **Habakkuk prays for an outpouring of God's mercy** in his day.

- God, **I know in the end** you are going to turn all this into joy, but **I really want to see my generation** included in that joy.
- **And so, I am crying out to you**, in the midst of my days, to pour out mercy...

Summit, shouldn't we be doing that?

- *When I see God's goodness expressed at the cross, not only do I have the faith to endure under trial, I yearn to see that goodness break out in our generation! I **want to see him do miracles...***
 - in the lives of my friends,
 - my kids...
 - this church...
 - Our city!
 - In this generation of souls all around the world!
 - Through our church planters!

Because, you see, **we have even more reason for confidence than Habakkuk, because ultimately the Exodus was a picture of what Jesus would do for us.**

- **Luke 9 records that at Jesus' transfiguration**, Moses and Jesus stood talking about the Exodus. And God the Father said that Moses was actually a dim shadow of Jesus; what Moses did only partially, Jesus would accomplish fully.
- **Moses merely *risked* his life** to liberate Israel from bondage, **Jesus gave** his life to liberate us from evil and sin and death itself.
- **Moses only *slew* a lamb to spread** its blood over the doorposts of Israel's houses, **Jesus was himself the Lamb** whose was slain so that his blood could cover our souls.
- **Moses established a system where priests** represented people before God, going into God's presence daily with the names of Israel engraved on precious stones worn over their hearts. **Jesus is himself our High Priest**, standing continually in God's presence on our behalf with our names engraved on his heart.

In the cross, I see his mercy, his heart, and that inspires me to great hope and confidence in prayer, ***today!***

Where are you? Need hope? Do you need to re-grasp God's goodness? Pray for an in-breaking of it in the present?

Let's spend some time remembering and repeating...

